Trouw

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Pralines do not belong in a chip bag

It is a walk to lick your fingers, but be warned. It is not good for your figure or condition. The temptations of this bonbon walk through the heart of Brussels are much too great for that.

NICOLE LUCAS November 7, 1998, 00:00

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Let's start at the beginning, as it should be. In the stylish Galerie de la Reine, where the praline was born in 1912. This happened at number 25-27, where Jean Neuhaus had established a pharmacy more than half a century earlier. To soften the taste of bitter pills and drinks, he also sold marshmallows, liquorice and chocolate. The sweets were clearly more popular, which meant that the medicines gradually faded into the background. Grandson Jean only dealt in chocolates and gave them increasingly beautiful shapes. His wife Louise Agostini made sure that they kept them. She was the inventor of the chocolate box in 1915. Previously, pralines were always sold in a cone. But where, according to experts, the small hard pieces at the bottom of fries are the tastiest, the cone lover only found a sticky mass in the cone. Since the arrival of the 'ballotin', the bottom layers also remain tasty. A second big name in the world of chocolate is located nearby, on the Grote Markt. Godiva was created in 1946 by Joseph Draps. From the age of fourteen, he learned the trade from his father Pierre. He supplied chocolate to various department stores, but Joseph found it far too uncreative. Through a clever marketing strategy, he and his wife Gabrielle

Belgian for almost 25 years. Since 1974, it has been owned by the American Campbell, of the soup. That may be the reason for the somewhat teasing 'The' Belgian Chocolate on the window of Galler, just, just not located on the Grote Markt anymore, but with the official address Botermarkt 44. Here Jean Galler opened his second shop in 1995. Enterprising Belgium already knew then that it would be a success. Shortly before that, the entrepreneurs had proclaimed Galler manager of the year. And earlier, the federation of (pastry) bakers saw that it was good. It gave Galler the title of 'most promising student' and he kept that promise. His bonbons are remarkably slim, and without much frills, but they are like the proverbial angel on your tongue. A little further on the other side, at number 31, is the beautiful biscuit shop of J. Dandoy. But that is not what we are talking about today, so we continue, via the Kleerkoperstraat, left into the Gretrystraat. 'Les delices de Melanie' is the name of the cozy shop with the beautiful chandelier that is located at number 27. Draps is the surname of the owner, daughter, yes, of the man who started Godiva. Melanie, however, did not like the American influence and started with her own specialties. The Rachmaninov for example, a bonbon in the shape of a grand piano. Employees of 'Melanie' have also taken the initiative to set up a Museum for Cocoa and Chocolate. It has been located on the Grote Markt for several months now,but unfortunately falls a bit short due to the (still) meagre collection. Turning the corner to the left, we come across the slobber wine under the pralines on the Anspach Boulevard. At number 46 they are sold directly, like chips, on the street. It was Leonidas Kestikides who settled here in 1935. The Greek, after having won several prizes in Ghent for his chocolate creations, had stuck with a nice Belgian one and never left again. Two-thirds of what is sold as Belgian chocolates now comes from Leonidas. The price-quality ratio is therefore certainly good. A kilo, packed in a box and paper by the saleswomen at an incredible speed, is at 460 Belgian francs at least half as cheap as the other delicacies mentioned here. As a result, you sometimes want to eat them a bit carelessly. And that is not the way Jean Neuhaus would have wanted

place, relax. Put the bonbon calmly in your mouth, let it melt for a moment. Bite three or four times, discover the delicate flavours of the inside and the outside and let this experience enrich you." For that feeling we walk on. Turn left into Lombardstraat, at number 24 is the young Planète Chocolat of Franck Duval. He was a maker of foie gras in a previous life, but three years ago on 6 December he started with a new passion, chocolate. True works of art are the bonbons that are delivered here and they are also sold as works of art. For the ultimate praline, however, we have to continue a little further, via Lebeaustraat, to the Grote Zavel, where the well-to-do Brussels bourgeoisie strolls somewhat bored past overpriced antique dealers. At number 6, the fourth generation now continues the tradition that began with Henri Wittamer in 1910. Stately ladies in white nurses' coats and white gloves sell the chocolates with a dedication that is infectious. You really do need to sit down quietly for this. What also helps is that a kilo here costs almost three times as much as at Leonidas. Well, okay, it doesn't really belong here, but since we're here anyway, take a look at number 12. Wittamer sells cakes there. They look so beautiful that eating them seems a shame. The same goes for the delicacies across the street. An absolute master lives at number 39. Pierre Marcolini became world champion pastry baker in Lyon in 1995 with a chocolate cake. Anyone who still has a sweet tooth can walk back to the Grand Place and have a Chocolat Viennois at La Chaloupe d'Or (numbers 24-25), a large cup of hot chocolate with whipped cream, with a piece of chocolate from a well-known brand. And if you're in the mood for something hearty, just grab a big bag of fries, with that typical Belgian, slightly sour mayonnaise. There's already plenty of sinning today!At number 46 they are sold directly, like chips, on the street. It was Leonidas Kestikides who settled here in 1935. The Greek, after having won several prizes in Ghent for his chocolate creations, had stuck with a nice Belgian one and never left. Two-thirds of what is sold as Belgian chocolates now comes from Leonidas. The price-quality ratio is therefore certainly good. A kilo, packed in a box and paper by the saleswomen at an incredible speed, is at 460 Belgian francs at

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